

## **I. Dynasty 272**

### Chapter 272: Conspiracy

The soft, seductive sounds of singing echoed throughout the room.

Zhao Yuanliang noticed the expression on Fang Chengyou's face and smiled faintly.

To him, everyone had a weakness.

Fang Chengyou was no different.

Though he always put on a righteous front in public, Zhao Yuanliang knew this man lusted after beauty more than life itself.

He clapped his hands—and three stunning women slowly walked in from the inner room.

They were exquisitely dressed, alluring, with sultry eyes and graceful poise.

"Director Fang," Zhao said, smiling,

“These three are handpicked performers raised by my father. Since childhood, they’ve lived in luxury—trained in music, chess, calligraphy, and painting. They bathe daily in flower-scented water and smell sweet even without makeup. Even the noble ladies of Chang’an can’t compare to them.”

At this point, Fang Chengyou wasn’t hearing a word.

His eyes were glued to the three women, unable to look away.

Zhao’s smile deepened.

He stepped in front of the first woman dressed in white. With a gentle tug, her silk robe slid to the floor like water—revealing a slender, fair-skinned body.

Then he did the same with the second, in red.

Then the third, in yellow.

All three now stood completely bare, and Fang Chengyou’s eyes widened. He swallowed hard.

“Director Fang,” Zhao said, “All three are still virgins. What do you think? Are they to your liking?”

“Prince Yuanliang, are you saying...?” Fang’s voice trembled with anticipation.

“My father values you greatly,” Zhao replied.

“He instructed me to gift you these three as your personal maidservants. I trust you’re pleased?”

“Pleased! Very pleased!” Fang replied, eyes shining.

But he also knew such gifts came with expectations.

So he asked, “What would you have me do, Your Highness?”

At that, Zhao Yuanliang’s expression turned dark.

“Why did the Emperor summon you to the palace?”

As the director of the Chang’an Machinery Department, Fang’s status was low—hardly worthy of an imperial audience. Normally, the emperor wouldn’t even give him a glance, let alone a summons.

So the fact that Emperor Wenxuan had called for him right after witnessing the cannon test made it obvious why.

Fang gave the three naked women another greedy glance and answered:

“His Majesty summoned me to discuss replicating the cannon.”

“Replicating?” Zhao sounded disappointed.

He had hoped the emperor had secretly obtained the blueprint.

“Yes. The Emperor has ordered the Firearms Camp to deliver a sample cannon to us for study,” Fang said.

Zhao narrowed his eyes. “And how confident are you in replicating it?”

Fang’s chest swelled with pride.

The emperor, the Crown Prince, and now Prince Zhao’s heir—all because of the cannon, he felt like a man of great importance.

“Your Highness,” he boasted, “The cannon is really no different from the fire lance. With some adjustments to size and powder, I believe we can replicate it within a month.”

“A bit exaggerated, isn’t it?” Zhao’s expression shifted.

After their trip to Qingzhou, Zhao had already tried replicating the cannon—but their prototypes were a disaster.

Full of air bubbles, misfires, and dangerous backfires—dozens of soldiers had died just testing them.

Their range and power were pitiful compared to Qingzhou’s weapons.

Worse yet, the production cost was nearly 8,000 to 9,000 taels per cannon, even though the quality was far worse.

But Fang, completely under the spell of lust and power, went on:

“Our Fang family has studied fire lances for generations. We’re not like ordinary craftsmen. Just give us one month.”

Zhao Yuanliang, like his father, was getting desperate.

They had offended Xiao Ming before and feared he might raise prices again.

If they could reproduce the technology, they were willing to pay any price.

“Then make sure you don’t forget who helped you when the cannon succeeds,” Zhao warned.

“Never. I’d never forget Your Highness,” Fang promised.

Zhao signaled to the three women. One of them cooed sweetly and pulled Fang toward the inner room.

The Crown Prince, having just finished his indulgences, got off the bed and lazily said:

“It’s a pity... Uncle only gave him the beauties. Why not give me a few too?”

Zhao Yuanliang frowned.

“Your Highness, the entire empire will be yours someday. Why argue over a few women?”

“Tch. You’re starting to sound like my mother.”

The Crown Prince sat down and drank water.

Then his face twisted with anger.

“That damn Xiao Ming... If it weren’t for his cannons, I wouldn’t have been so humiliated. And my mother—what is she thinking, telling me to win him over? He has nothing but cannons! Does he even deserve it?”

He still remembered how he wet himself when the cannon fired.

Now all his fury had landed squarely on Xiao Ming.

Zhao Yuanliang’s brows furrowed deeper.

Before, the Crown Prince’s position was shaky.

Even Empress Zhao had tried every trick to secure his future.

But ever since Prince Zhao returned to the capital and Emperor Wenxuan indirectly promised not to depose him, the Crown Prince had grown arrogant—no longer seeing Xiao Ming as a threat.

He never imagined that Xiao Ming—once dismissed as useless—would rise to such heights.

Now, the situation was reversed.

It wasn't about winning over Xiao Ming anymore—he didn't even care about the succession struggle.

"Xiao Ming is not the same anymore. It's best not to provoke him. When you become emperor, then you can deal with him however you like," Zhao advised.

At the mention of becoming emperor, the Crown Prince suddenly exploded.

He swept the tea set off the table and shouted:

"Emperor? Emperor?! When will I ever become emperor? I'm already in my thirties! Do I have to wait until I'm sixty?! How can I ascend the throne while my father still lives?!"

Zhao Yuanliang was horrified. He rushed forward and clamped his hand over the Crown Prince's mouth.

"Careful, Your Highness! If the Emperor hears that, you'll lose even the crown prince's title!"

The Crown Prince broke down crying.



“Is there another prince my age still waiting? Do you know what the ministers call me? The Elderly Crown Prince! That’s what they say!”

Zhao Yuanliang fell silent.

It was true—he was far too old for a Crown Prince.

But truthfully, Zhao Yuanliang wasn’t hoping for the Crown Prince to take the throne.

To him, the Crown Prince was still a member of the Xiao royal family.

This empire—it was time for a Zhao to rule.